



## longbract spiderwort *Tradescantia bracteata*, Small

### Alternate Common Names

spiderwort, prairie spiderwort, bracted spiderwort, long-bracted spiderwort, sticky spiderwort

### Functional Group

forbs (wildflowers)

### Family

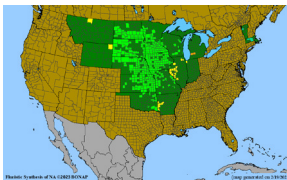
dayflower and spiderwort family (Commelinaceae)

### Description

- » **Life cycle/growth form:** Perennial with fibrous roots, spreading by rhizomes to form colonies.
- » **Height:** 1/2-1 1/2 ft
- » **Leaves and stem:** Leaves 4 to 10 in long, floppy, creased at the midvein, with smooth surface (though often with hairs on margins) and parallel veins; base of leaves sheath the stem; stem is smooth, rarely branched; plants form clumps of multiple stems from the base.
- » **Flower:** Flowers in a terminal cluster of few to many flowers (occasionally also in leaf axils) with a prominent pair of bracts at their base as long as the stem leaves; flowers 1 in wide, 3-parted, violet to pink (occasionally white), bearing 6 stamens with hairy filaments and a single blue style; sepals are hairy, distinguishing *T. bracteata* from *T. ohimensis* (bluejacket or Ohio spiderwort); each flower blooms for one day (generally fading after morning), but flowering is staggered within a cluster; the hairy stalk supporting each flower stands up when flowering but droops once blooming is done.
- » **Fruit/seed head:** Seed capsules are 3-celled and 1/4 in long, obovoid shape, developing within the persistent hairy sepals; splitting open at maturity to release 2-6 seeds.
- » **Pollination:** Insects, primarily bees and flower flies (syrphids).



### Habitat and Range



Dry to mesic soil; full sun; sand prairies, black soil prairies, woodland edges, along railroads, roadsides; Wetland Indicator Status is Facultative Upland (FACU) for the Midwest; well-drained loamy soils are

recommended for seed production.

### Conservation Status

Global- G5, secure; Michigan- SX, presumed extirpated; Wyoming- S1, critically imperiled; Arkansas and Illinois- S2, imperiled; in all other states within its natural range, status is S4 (apparently secure) to S5 (secure) or unranked. (NatureServe)

### General Comments

This is an attractive, early flowering species that persists through vegetative spread and reseeding in both high quality prairies and in somewhat disturbed areas. The flowers produce pollen but no nectar, hence they are visited primarily by bees that use pollen to provision their larvae or by syrphid flies that feed directly on pollen. Once the seed matures, the above ground parts of the plants wither and plants remain dormant until the next growing season, although small shoots may emerge in fall. This species is distinguished from similar species in our region by having glandular hairs on both sepals and flower stalks and prominent bracts under the inflorescences that are as long and wide as the stem leaves. Bracted spiderwort is generally a smaller plant than *T. ohimensis* (bluejacket or Ohio spiderwort) and can spread vegetatively to form large colonies, while bluejacket is more clumped.

### Establishment for Seed Production (Appendix A)

#### Direct seeding:

We do not have experience with direct seeding this species for seed production.

#### Greenhouse:

- » **Seed pre-treatment:** At least 90 days cold stratification.
- » **Sowing:** Sow about 1/4 inch deep in the greenhouse about 2 months before the last frost date.
- » **Transplanting:** When plugs are well rooted, take them outside to harden off for a week or two, then transplant in rows suitable for cultivation or at 8-12 inch intervals in plastic mulch.

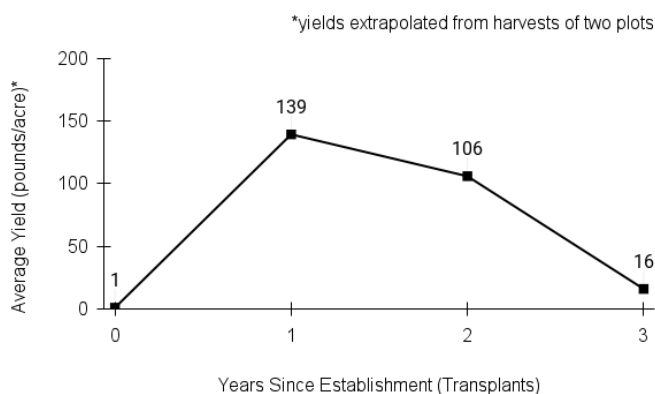
### Stand Management

- » **Weeds:** Prepare a clean, weed-free bed. Plastic mulch suppresses weeds in the establishment year but should be removed in subsequent years to allow vegetative spread. Mow or cultivate between rows. This species appears to be fairly intolerant of competition from weeds. Planting in rows between sheets of landscape fabric might facilitate harvest by allowing capture of seed that drops as it matures, but we have not tried this.
- » **Pests:** None noted.
- » **Diseases:** None noted.
- » **Hybridization risk:** This species is known to hybridize with other members of the genus *Tradescantia* such as *T. ohimensis* (bluejacket or Ohio spiderwort). Maintain separation distances between plots of these species.

### Seed Production (Appendix B)

- » **First harvest:** Expect very little flowering and seed set in the first year. Peak yields occur in year 2 and/or 3.
- » **Yield:** 100-140 pounds per acre in year 2 to year 3 (extrapolated from harvests of two plots at TPC)

- » **Stand life:** Productive stand life is 3-4 years. Yields begin to decline in year 3 or 4 and after.
- » **Flowering date:** mid May to mid June in northeast Iowa
- » **Seed maturity/Harvest date:** late June to early July in northeast Iowa
- » **Seed retention:** High risk of shattering. Seed drops from the plant as each capsule matures. There is no perfect way to time the harvest. Observe plants frequently as typical harvest dates approach. Turn over seedheads and look for dry, brown, open capsules among the hairy sepals. Plan to harvest when there are some mature capsules on most plants. If whole stalks are collected, capsules will continue to mature and release seed as they dry. If planted in rows between sheets of landscape fabric, it's possible that dropped seed could be swept or vacuumed from the fabric.
- » **Harvest date range at TPC (2003-2022):** June 24 - July 22
- » **Recommended harvest method:** When most plants have some mature capsules in their seed heads, cut entire stalks and lay on tarp to dry. Provide ventilation and turn thick piles regularly to avoid mold growth. Seed will be released onto tarp as capsules mature and can then be easily screened from the dry stalks.



## Seed Cleaning Process (Appendix C)

Pass material through 1/2 inch mesh to remove dried stalks, then airscreen.

## Seed Characteristics (Appendix D)



- » **Seeds per ounce:** 10,000 seeds/oz (IA NRCS)
- » **1000 seed weight:** 3.12g (Seed Information Database)
- » **Description:** Seeds dark gray (sometimes tan), oblong in outline with a dimple on one side and complex, grooved surface texture;

2-3 mm long and 1.5 mm wide.

- » **Seed storage:** cool/dry (33-50° F, 30-50% RH)
  - » **Typical seed test:**
    - PLS: 88% (n = 11)
    - Purity: 95% (n = 11)
    - Germination: 7% (n = 10)
    - Dormancy: 85% (n = 10)
- (averages obtained from n tests of purchased seed lots)

## Released Germplasm

- » **Source Identified material:** Natural Selections/Iowa Ecotype Zone 2 (central Iowa)

## References

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- USDA NRCS National Plant Data Team. (n.d.). *Tradescantia bracteata* Small. USDA plants database. <https://plants.usda.gov/home/plantProfile?symbol=TRBR>

Species Updated: 12/22/2025

## Notes